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Editors Note

W

e live in a world where the media cycle is seemingly never-ending. News stories cover an array of topics. From the most mundane of human reality to war. When our team began the process of writing for this edition, the world looked very different. Yet over the course of just a few weeks, the state of the world shifted dramatically. The feeling of 'normality' here in Europe was drastically impacted, and our focus drifted to the east of the continent. Glued to our phones, watching the news, and scrolling through social media, there are two distinct realities that we all balance: That of our everyday life, where the sun is shining and responsibilities continue, and that of the news, where struggle and horror are normalized. Midway through writing this edition, we experienced this shift, from the old reality to the new. During this edition, our authors examine several aspects of both of these realities, from politics to the impact of war. Our coverage of the on-going situation is limited, nevertheless, two of our authors write about the situation in Ukraine. Our intent is to attempt to cover what is happening in a timely way, within the restrictions which we are under.

When faced with topics that strike such anger and discomfort, many of us take to the streets to voice our frustrations. When war broke out, this occurred around the world. On the cover page, you see a picture from a protest. The blue and yellow of the Ukrainian flag are stark among the masked faces of protesters. Yet if you look closer you might also see other signs, like, for example, the blue and yellow of the European Union. A sign of unity. As the days have slowly gone by, and war has continued to rage, much of the world has come together, in a rare lapse of unity under one cause. This picture, and this issue, captures this sense. People coming together, under two colors, under the backdrop of a pandemic. The complexity of our current state of affairs is emphasized.

I would like to extend a big thank you to the entire team for their unwavering support and hard work to produce this edition. A special thank you to the writers and editors in this Collective Reporter edition. I hope that you enjoy reading and that you, like me, learn something new.

Fenna Milbauer

The War in Ukraine: Putin's Invasion and its Global Effects

by Emma Berndt

For months, Russian President Vladimir Putin had denied intentions to invade its neighboring country Ukraine. Nevertheless, Russia had been imposing its dominance in the former Soviet region for some time. Then, after recognizing the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk—territories that are part of Ukraine’s historically relevant Donbas region—Putin justified the mobilization of troops into Ukraine. In the morning of February 24, the world watched as Russian troops invaded Ukraine, even beyond the recognized Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and into the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv.

Aside from the Bosnian War of the 1990s, this war has been the most destructive conflict during the 76 years of relative peace in Europe. The war has been brutal, and is already under investigation for several war crimes, as well as having caused a worldwide humanitarian crisis from people leaving the country. Despite the build-up of Russian troops on the Ukrainian border and ongoing threats made by Putin, Russia's invasion came suddenly for many Europeans and Russians.

This ongoing war with Russia confirms the persisting geopolitical instabilities within Eastern Europe, and the lengths that Russia will go to use its influence and control over the region. Sanctions, as well as aid from all EU member states and international organizations, have not been able to deter Putin yet. Has the Western world been naïve about Putin's plans? What motivates him, and what else is his endgame in this conflict he has started?



President Vladimir Putin speaks during a Security Council meeting in the Kremlin in Moscow

What happened during the first week in Ukraine?

“On paper, the war between Russia and Ukraine is not a fair fight,” Zack Beauchamp of Vox has pointed out. “Russia outnumbers Ukraine in troops, armed vehicles, aircrafts... Their weapons are more advanced and have more superior capacities in cyberspace.” However, the war is not going the way Putin has expected it.

President Zelenskyy: "It is genocide of Ukrainians"

So far, Russian forces have not been able to take Kyiv, and have not established air or sea superiority. Even some of Russia’s logistic and strategic plans are failing. Simple logistic tasks, like procuring enough fuel for the tanks or communicating strategies among ranks, are proving difficult for Russian troops. Nevertheless, Russia has launched a destructive shocking and devastating brute force attack by air, land and, sea on Ukraine. Putin’s forces are bombing cities and military bases.

During an attack on the capital of Kyiv, Russian forces have bombed a local TV tower in the capital. This was, according to the Russian army, a strategic target due to a so-called risk that the Ukrainians would conspire attacks on Russian schools. This message became communicated through Ukrainian television. Russian officials claim not to want to harm civilians but instead want to protect them. However, the Russian forces have bombed city centers and residential areas in multiple Ukrainian cities. The Ukrainian president is calling it genocide of the Ukrainian people.

On March 1, Ukraine's second largest city, Kharkiv, was bombed. The Freedom Square, opera house and residential areas were damaged. More attacks on big cities are expected soon, and Ukrainians fear that Russia will soon invade the capital of Ukraine, Kyiv. The mayor of the city, Vitali Klitschko, said, "Our armed forces, territorial defense forces, are fighting heroically for our land". Near Kyiv, a 60 kilometer convoy is waiting with tanks, trucks and other military gear. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy—who has risen to worldwide recognition as an iconic figure for Ukrainian resistance—has said that keeping the capital safe is the government's key priority. "This is the heart of our country, and it must keep beating," Zelenskyy said. And so far, Russians troops have not been able to successfully penetrate the capital. Nevertheless, it is still early in the invasion.

"The Russian operation is a bizarre scheme, based on terrible political assumptions."

Various news media (such as CNN and BBC) are reporting that the Russian campaign seems based on a flawed strategy. As specified by Russian families whose sons fight in the army, some soldiers had no idea about the invasion, they were surprised with a war,

others are not capable of performing basic battlefield functions. Micheal Kofman, director of Russian studies at CNA, said, "The Russian operation is a bizarre scheme, based on terrible political assumptions, with poor relationship to their training & capabilities."



Russian bombs destroy children's and maternity hospital in Mariupol. (Source: NY Times)

Although the war is not going as rapidly as Putin might have hoped for, the operations continue. Russia is preparing to launch a "large-scale information and psychological operation" against Ukraine, according to Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov. This operation, Reznikov claims, contributes to the goal of breaking the resistance of Ukrainians with fabricated reports about surrender and other propaganda tactics.

What to expect?

Despite Russia's advantage over Ukraine and the destruction brought from its ongoing onslaught, Putin's war is causing Russia massive economic losses. So far, major brands like Disney+, Adidas, energy giant Shell and others have ended their partnership with Russia. And it's not only giant companies that are leaving Russia. Foreign investors are also dumping their Russian assets, and the Russian ruble is drastically losing value. The currency is tumbling after western nations decided to put damaging sanctions on the country's financial sector.

So, are Putin's goals worth the economic damage?

According to Jaap de Hoof Scheffer, former secretary general of NATO and former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, "I don't think Putin wants to and can occupy the whole country, he doesn't have the people for that." Instead, de Hoof Scheffer reasoned, Putin wants a government in Kyiv that listens to him and stays away from western influences like NATO and EU membership.

Russia is already calling in reinforcements due to the support Ukraine receives. Calling up additional reserves is very damaging to the economy and will cause further dissatisfaction under the Russians who do not seem to support this war. As reported by several families in Russia and certain news outlets, Putin could be seriously ill. While is sanity if questioned by many, Russians believe their president might be fighting a more serious illness. Former head of the Public Relations Department at Moscow, Valery Solovei, has claimed Putin underwent emergency surgery to treat cancer. But also retired Royal Navy Admiral Chris Parry has claimed that President Putin might be suffering from cancer and implied that it would explain his determination to press ahead with war. With Peter the Great being Putin's hero, it could be that Putin is trying to bring back the tsarist Russian empire.

"Cancer might explain [Putin's] determination to press ahead with war."

The role of the EU and NATO in this war Ukraine is a large country between Europe and Russia, and a democracy of around 44 million people. Ukraine is currently not an EU member state or a member of NATO, merely a NATO partner. Ukraine's potential to become a NATO member, or an EU member, is a reason for Putin's attack, as he sees such a partnership as a threat to Russian sovereignty.

Nevertheless, on March 1, Zelenskyy urged the European Parliament to accept Ukraine as a member of the EU in relation to Russia's invasion. Via video, dressed in a green army shirt, Zelenskyy exclaimed that Ukraine was fighting to protect European values.

President Zelenskyy: "We are giving our lives for values, freedom... [Europe]... prove that you are with us... that you will not let us go."

Zelenskyy has been interested in becoming a member of the EU for longer time. To be accepted as an EU member state, means the country must protect all European values such as being a democracy, freedom of movement and human dignity. To the members of parliament, Zelenskyy said, "We are giving our lives for values, freedom, for rights and the desire to be equal. We are giving away our strongest people. Do prove that you are with us. Do prove that you will not let us go. Do prove that you are indeed Europeans and then life will win over death, and light will win over darkness."

European Parliament has shown remorse and solidarity for Ukraine. President of Parliament Roberta Metsola has spoken in favor of welcoming Ukraine's application for candidate status. It should be noted that this process will take years.

Regarding consequences for Russia, the SWIFT payment system has become crucial in the Western sanctions against Russia. SWIFT is a global payment messaging system. The global payments messaging system facilitates transactions worth trillions between banks every day. The system is also used by many western countries to pay for Russian oil and gas. Many European countries rely heavily on gas and oil from Russia.

This sanction will influence Putin's operation as well as the lives of many Russians which may cause more Russians to take a stand against Putin. Putin has already stated that he compares the sanctions as a declaration of war.

"PUTIN HAS ALREADY STATED THAT HE COMPARES SANCTIONS AS DECLARATION OF WAR"

NATO plays an important role in the Russia Ukraine conflict. Members of NATO consult on issues and make decisions on political and military matters affecting their security. Fundamentally, NATO helps defend the territory and safety of its members, which Ukraine is not. Nevertheless, Ukraine is a NATO partner, meaning that it cooperates with NATO but is not covered the security guarantee in the Alliance's founding treaty. Putin has demanded more than once that NATO should not expand any closer to Russian borders. NATO is helping in any way they can by offering weapons, medical supplies and other vital military equipment but also financial assistance and humanitarian aid to civilians. People around the globe are protesting to call an end to this horrific war.



Protest in front of Russian embassy in The Hague. (source: Kinza from Collective)

On streets throughout the world, the chants "Slava Ukraini, Heroyam Slava!" are shouted by protesters, meaning: "Glory to Ukraine, Glory to the Heroes." The protests (both online and offline) show solidarity towards Ukraine, and hope to shame the Russian government into stopping this aggressive war. In addition to worldwide outrage, sanctions and other acts of isolation toward Russia's economy are some of the tools being deployed to counter the Russian invasion. However, the war does not seem to end any time soon, and news updates pop-up every hour through various media outlets, painting a picture of the despair and destruction that is yet to come.



Emma is European Studies student at THUAS. As a proclaimed workaholic, in her free time she studies journalism and content marketing. When she isn't studying she is glued to her camera. She enjoys the creative process of styling models and taking photographs for her portfolio. But she'd also never decline a walk in the beautiful city to get overpriced latte's.

What Makes a Vaccine Skeptic? Why and How Vaccine Hesitancy Persists During the Pandemic

by Gary Izquier



Thousands of protesters gather in The Hague to oppose Dutch government COVID-19 regulations (source: ANP).

As vaccination rates increase, and Dutch society's broad relaxation of COVID-19 regulations signals a possible end to the pandemic, the issue of vaccine skepticism and hesitancy persists as a point of focus.

Research published on *JAMA Network Open* (an open access medical journal) showed that, over longer periods of time, most vaccine skeptics eventually get vaccinated. Nevertheless, with almost 87% of the Netherlands' adult population fully vaccinated, the question remains:

Who are the 13% that refuse the COVID-19 vaccine, and what are their justifications for continuing to remain such a determined—and notably outspoken—minority?

Here at The Hague University, members of this minority have expressed their doubts over COVID-19 vaccines, displaying a line of critical thinking that society, for better or for worse, often ignores.

Hannah Knulst, an International Communications student at THUAS, is not against others getting vaccinated, but dislikes the societal pressure—mostly from the government—to get the vaccine.

“The government doesn't give enough information about the vaccine, how it works, what's in it,” Knulst said.

“It's not fully tested. It's a new method of making the vaccine, which was tested before but was denied, because it was not safe.”

And although claims of the vaccine being rushed are firmly disputed by government medical agencies (such as the USA's FDA and the EU's European Commission) who attribute its speedy approval to the urgency of the pandemic, Knulst insisted that she would prefer the government would have done "more research" into the vaccines before having implemented them.

"With me and my friends, we just ignore the subject [of vaccines]. You feel really isolated."

Hannah Knulst, THUAS student

Knulst also added that the government's inconsistent response and communications is another issue that concerns her about the vaccine and the general COVID-19 response.

"They didn't put in extra beds [in hospitals], they didn't recruit [medical workers], they downgraded the ICUs... if the money spent on vaccines was spent on hospital beds there wouldn't be that problem." She mentioned the government's inconsistent policies on facemasks (sometimes they were enforced, sometimes not) are also a similar example of government mismanagement.

As a student, Knulst admits that the topic is divisive. "With me and my friends, we just ignore the subject. You feel really isolated."

But as isolated as she might feel, she is not alone in her criticism of the government's vaccine rollout.

Peter Hanssen, a lecturer of International Communications at THUAS, also shares skepticism toward the government's vaccine strategy, as well as what he calls a "very black and white" approach on behalf of authorities.

"The government went for [the vaccine]... but didn't really get into what treatment options are available," Hanssen said. He added that

most governments, in response to COVID-19, favored vaccines over treatment largely due to commercial interests, instead of a true intent to overcome the pandemic.

This, he explained, is part of an overall misguided policy that overrides individual rights to bodily integrity.

Bodily integrity, the idea that each person is entitled to choose what they accept into or out of their own bodies, is a large part of the overall sentiment against the pressure to get vaccinated.

Hanssen explained that when considering policy, governments sometimes forego these individual rights in favor of what they call public safety.

"I'm not anti-vaccine... I'm just not in favor of how this has been managed [by government]."

Peter Hanssen, THUAS lecturer

This prioritization of individual rights over public safety, he explains, creates the urge for certain members of society to resist such policies if they do not deem them as sensible.

"I'm not anti-vaccine," Hanssen clarified, "I'm just not in favor of how this has been managed [by government]."

This general distrust for government policy, now associated with its involvement in the COVID-19 response, was also shared by Knulst, who confessed that, as a student, she often finds it difficult to express opposition against what she sees as often ineffective regulations.

"I always have to explain myself [to peers who ask] 'why not get the vaccine?'" she said. "But maybe you should explain yourself why did you vaccinate?"

She reasoned that some vaccinated people have



People sign up for their vaccines at a local vaccination center (source: RIVM).

not properly researched the vaccine, and might be unaware of any potential risks.

Nevertheless, Knulst also agrees that choosing to get the vaccine is not wrong, and that most people get vaccinated for mainly practical reasons. “I would never judge someone who is vaccinated, because it’s their choice.”

Regardless of the medical validity of claims made by those who oppose COVID-19 regulations, the issue of vaccine hesitancy as a public crisis is perhaps more characteristically defined by the study of communications rather than medicine.

Han de Looper, Crisis Communications lecturer at THUAS, explained the various circumstances that cause doubt in government during times of crises like the pandemic.

“[COVID-19] is not very visual, as a crisis,” de Looper said, “People need a visual. [In the Netherlands] the news of COVID didn’t really hit until [people saw] the coffins in Italy... around early 2020... then, there was this visual element to it, and that remained strong. So, the first lockdown made sense.”

However, de Looper noted that soon after, inconsistent messaging on issues like facemasks (and whether or not they were truly efficient)) began to “dent the credibility” of government advice in people’s eyes during the later COVID-19 waves.

“The facemask thing is the strongest example of a lack of consistency,” de Looper said. “And if you look, there is a strong correlation

“People overestimate their own understanding of things, and it’s increasingly problematic,”

Han de Looper, THUAS lecturer

between people who don’t like to wear masks and people who don’t want to vaccinate.”

De Looper added that, although concerns over government inconsistency are legitimate, those who reject regulations such as vaccines are typically looking at limited or anecdotal information, often from unreliable sources which promote unsubstantiated claims.



Students at The Hague University wear facemasks, which are no longer mandatory as of March 2022 (Source: THUAS)

“People overestimate their own understanding of things, and it’s increasingly problematic,” he said. He explained that he recognizes his own ignorance when it comes to medicine, but that many people assume they know more than they do, particularly regarding medical topics.

The main obstacle for government when addressing doubts from vaccine skeptics is overcoming the damage that previous inconsistent policies have done to their image. “Crisis communications... is all about trying to mitigate damage to reputation... [If not] then the messenger becomes the message.” in the context of a pandemic, the "messenger

becoming the message" translates into people distrusting vaccine advice from government based on general, often non-COVID related instances of government mismanagement.

Therefore, even as COVID-19 seems to be on its way to becoming controlled, vaccine hesitancy will continue to be a relevant obstacle as society aims to reach this crisis’ finish line. Knowing how to address such vaccine hesitancy will become almost as important as getting the vaccine, and it will be up to individuals and government authorities to figure out the most productive ways to conduct such a dialogue in the future.



Gary is a Venezuelan-American student of International Communications at THUAS. As a Millennial in a class full of Gen-Z students, he hopes to learn but also express whatever wisdom he can give to a younger, international community. When he isn't studying, working, or discussing controversial issues, he can be found either gaming, debating people, or pretending to be Bob Dylan on the guitar.

The Unprotected: What Happens When the COVID-19 Regulation System Fails Us

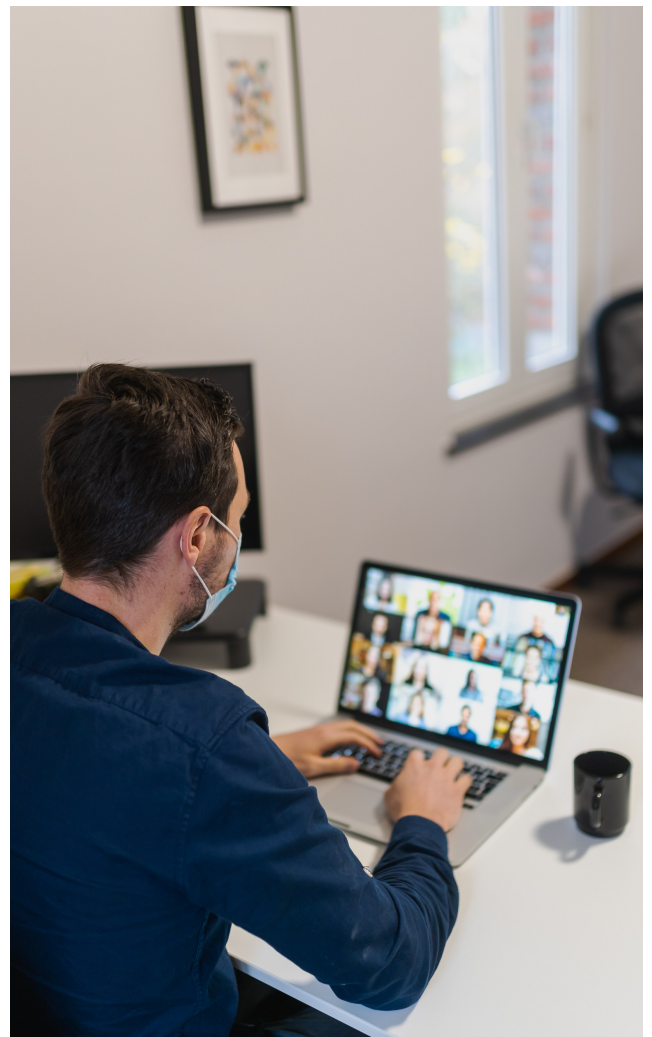
by Ju Laclau Massaglia

We often hear that systems and regulations are set in place for our protection. We follow these rules and obey government guidelines which, in theory, afford us safety, security, and predictability in exchange for our compliance. Especially during chaotic and particularly uncertain periods, we are expected to keep our instincts in check, to favour the codes that have been set in place to limit us into the expected behaviour.

COVID-19 was no exception. In fact, it could be argued that the pandemic was an example of the system working at its finest: leading fearful and hopeless societies forward, manoeuvring in an unknown world and helping a diverse mass of people make the right decision regarding their safety and their duty towards their community.

The Netherlands is only one of the many countries that had to find ways in which to organise a variety of issues, such as lockdowns, distancing, jeopardising its economy, exhausting its society and ultimately delivering vaccinations. To achieve some order amidst the chaos created by COVID-19 in society, the Dutch government—as many others—created rules and regulations aimed at protecting its population and containing the virus and its rate of harm.

However, many people fell through the cracks of this system, and these cracks are wide and prominent among various policies. There are



COVID-19 regulations in the Netherlands included the use of masks inside (source: @maximeutopix).

many reasons for this, each situation as unique as the person trapped in it.

The following are summaries of interviews from the people who find themselves currently stuck in the cracks of today's COVID-19 response system. Their names have been kept *anonymous*, but their stories are *real*.

Political differences

During the pandemic, M. (who is using an alternative initial to ensure anonymity) was in Russia, where the only recognised vaccine is Sputnik—produced with the help of the Russian government. Therefore, it was the only one available for her to take. After getting both shots of it in her home country—the second one in July 2021—she moved to the Netherlands where she started the long and unrewarding process of waiting for her vaccination certificate to be valid in the European Union.

However, due to political and systematic differences, Russia never presented the proper documentation to get their vaccination approved, but seems to be waiting for the EU to accept it before they accept other vaccines. So despite the fact that from the perspective of Russia, the World Health Organisation, and several other countries around the globe M. was fully vaccinated, in the Netherlands she had no possibility of proving it nor a chance to get the Pfizer booster shot she had initially hoped to get after moving.

“Stop making everything about health political because health should come before politics.”

M.

Finding herself very limited and her social life harshly restricted, she decided to get both shots of Pfizer shortly after her last Sputnik one with the hope to be fully vaccinated for both governments by the end of November 2021. Still, this was not enough, both Russia and several areas of the EU expect their citizens to get a booster shot in order to extend their immunity. So, once again, M. found herself restricted. Medically, she was advised not to get a booster shot of either vaccine for now since

having had four shots plus having recovered from COVID-19 within a period of little over a year is as much as her body can handle. But, being unable to prove this either in the Netherlands or Russia, she has been kept from even entering restaurants and cafes during her recent trip to Germany.

Even though she has given up on the hope of the Russian government presenting the appropriate documents, she hopes the EU will help her, and every other immigrant in a similar condition, by allowing her to file a report and have her particular case examined by a medical specialist.

“Stop making everything about health political because health should come before politics,” M. said, while still considering going ahead with the medically risky booster shot if the regulations change and push her to do so in the name of health and safety.

Tales from Korea

C. moved from Korea to the Netherlands several years ago, so she was already settled when the COVID-19 pandemic started. Quickly she noticed that while the Netherlands was relaxing their restrictions, Korea kept very tight rules in place: 14-day quarantines upon arrival to the country monitored by phone calls from government agents checking up every day and face masks enforced everywhere, even when exercising outside away from other people. That was the situation that welcomed C. when she visited her parents in Korea in 2020, as well as the reason why she did not visit her family in 2021.

The time she spent in Korea since the pandemic started was marked by constant stress. Her parents chose to leave her alone in their family house so that she could spend her quarantine there. Suddenly, C. got the feeling that her autonomy, in her own country, had been taken

away from her.

To add to the hustle, C. is not sure if her Dutch vaccination QR-code will be acceptable in Korea due to the very different systems that are in place in each country. Still, she is happy she could get vaccinated in the Netherlands, since in Korea, they kept on postponing the vaccination of young people in favour of older ones, and she truly wanted to be vaccinated and feel safe.

In the Netherlands, restrictions were less severe and C. adapted to them, living as any other young person would. But her parents disagree: she should be wearing a mask everywhere and upholding the Korean standards and practices even when abroad.



Masks are still required in public transportation (source: Norbert Braun)

For C. this was a learning journey of trying to find herself, even in the context of the pandemic and even when being Asian often meant being stared at and treated differently in the Netherlands. At the beginning of the pandemic, people would stand farther away from her than from others. They would also speak about her. So she developed further habits to try to feel comfortable with being herself despite what others did around her and made choices for her

own mental peace, such as wearing headphones everywhere to protect herself from receiving rude comments.

The hardship of the BSN appointment

Many people experience culture shock from even the smallest things when moving to another country. For R. one of these culture shocks was QR-codes. In her home country of Bulgaria, people show a physical vaccination certificate. That would not be a problem for her though: due to some debate about whether the storage methods of vaccines used in Bulgaria were the appropriate ones, she had waited until arriving in the Netherlands to get her shots.

Soon after, one of her new classmates asked her to go with her to the vaccination centre. R. researched to make sure she was eligible. Upon seeing that she met all requirements, she accompanied her to get her first shot. It was not until after filing the paperwork that she was asked for her BSN number, a requirement she had never heard of before and was not communicated to her when she initially asked if lack of registration would be an obstacle for getting the vaccine.

“For C. this was a learning journey of trying to find herself, even in the context of the pandemic and even when being Asian often meant being stared at and treated differently in the Netherlands.”



Vaccination in the Netherlands has several requirements, like having a BSN number (source: @cdc)

“It was not until after filing the paperwork that she was asked for her BSN number, a requirement she had never heard of before and was not communicated to her.”

With her registration appointment months away and no other option, C. decided to postpone her vaccination and make use of the 24-hour certificates that are available after receiving a negative PCR result from the Community Health Service (GGD). Luckily for her, at least testing in the Netherlands is offered for free.

Ju likes to describe herself as a work in progress. Being a person who gets bored easily, she learned at a young age that the best way to stay entertained is to look for the next adventure. But one thing never changes: She can't image her life without writing. Her interest in meeting amazing people, such as the ones she found in Collective, is only surpassed by her desire to hear their stories over a cup of tea, coffee or hot chocolate.

Nevertheless, the unavoidable and time-consuming testing continued all the way until the winter break when—still without a BSN and confused about changing requirements available mostly in Dutch—she returned to Bulgaria and got her two shots. Nevertheless, she will not be able to get a QR code in the Corona Check app until she has completed her registration process, which has not yet started.

For now, R. goes to restaurants with her paper certificate, interacting with puzzled staff, but knowing that in a couple of weeks she will have her registration appointment. After that, her BSN will arrive in the mail and then she will have to apply to get her DigiD. Then, she will finally be able to show the Corona App at a restaurant, assuming that QR-codes are still even necessary by then.



Addressing a Few Failed Goals by Environmental and Climate Change Movements

By Rumbidzai Mudzongo

Climate change, global warming, and environmental justice are all terms thrown around on social media and in discussions by governments, corporations, and other stakeholders.

However, it seems that not enough—or perhaps anything at all—has been achieved in addressing climate change during the past few years, despite campaigns for both individual and country-level accountability. Taking action by going vegan, advocating for clean energy, or riding bicycles instead of driving have indeed been promoted as ways to take further steps to reduce our carbon footprint. However, there are different issues hindering this progress from happening.

The UN Change Conference (COP26)

Last October, 120 world leaders and 40,000 registered participants came together for two weeks in Glasgow to discuss the state of climate change. The UN Climate Change Conference (COP) is held annually in different countries and focuses on different goals. This year's aims were to discuss their plan to “Recognizing the emergency, Accelerating action, Moving away from fossil fuels, Delivering on climate finance, Stepping up support for adaptation, Completing the Paris rulebook, and Focusing on loss & damage.”

Barbados PM Mia Amor Mottley declared what many countries have ignored but is necessary to note: “The pandemic has taught us that national solutions to global problems do not work.”

She encouraged world leaders to take responsibility for rising global temperatures.

Her proposed solution to this is “An annual increase in SDRs (Special Drawing Rights) of \$500 billion for 20 years put in a trust.” At this point, proper funding and consistent action are the only ways we will be able to either stop any further damage or maybe even reverse it. One notable aspect of Mottley's speech was how she pinpointed these problems and provided concrete solutions that will actually make a quick impact.

What can be taken from this speech is the importance of taking action, amplifying the voices and the efforts of people on the frontlines of climate change and pushing for more diversity and inclusion in decision making leadership roles, to allow for more relevant involvement for these causes.

Some critics of the conference, such as Charlie Gardner, a conservation biologist at the University of Kent in Canterbury, have pointed out that greater commitment and radical action needs to be taken to bring an end to fossil-fuel production. Individual country efforts to curb climate change and environmental issues have come short of the mark time and time again because we are increasingly becoming more connected globally in every way possible.



World leaders at the evening reception on opening day (source: The Guardian)

Therefore, for such meeting initiatives to be met world leaders need to place more emphasis on global efforts such as greater investment in renewable energy by governments, reducing fossil fuel production and consistent community commitment and less on individual ability to handle such a global issue. With current ongoing conflicts, this dependence on fossil fuel and non-sustainable gas energy becomes an even more complex problem.

Fossil fuels and their impact

In July 2021, a circular inferno off the Gulf of Mexico was captured on camera. After five hours, the flames were finally extinguished but the reasons for the fire remain unclear. This fire was the result of a leak in a pipe underwater owned by a Mexican oil company, Petróleos Mexicanos, or Pemex, as reported by Reuters.

The drilling and usage of fossil fuels such as oil and gas have undoubtedly had a negative effect on our environment and our health. Multiple studies being done (one in particular by Harvard University) have pointed out that fossil fuels cause poor air quality that can bring on serious health effects such as respiratory diseases and early deaths. This is of course besides the tremendous ecological damage done to the sea by Pemex's spill.

This incident is one of many not only credited to Pemex but one of many that have occurred in the past few years caused by faulty and negligent practices by oil and gas companies, such as BP, Exxon Shipping company, and Shell.

On one hand, our societies have reached a stage where fossil fuels such as oil and gas are pivotal to our functioning but greater steps are being taken to find alternatives and reduce our reliance on them. With the rise of alternative energy, society seems to aim for a transition away from fossil fuels.

However, with incidents of oil spills, the rising amount of plastic, and waste dumped in the oceans, the notion of going green seems unlikely in the near future.

Whilst a great emphasis has been put on individual accountability for the amount of meat we eat, the number of single-use plastics we have in our homes, as well as improving society's recycling efforts, more focus is needed to influence major companies and governments to change their policies on fossil fuels and moving towards more sustainable sources of energy.



Ocean fire off the Gulf of Mexico, called the "Eye of the fire" (source: Climate Home News)

Wild Animal conservation and human overpopulation

With talks of resource shortages, particularly land and water, there is a greater focus in recent years on conserving space and protecting wild animals. For years there have been various campaigns to save rhinos, protect elephants and repopulate lion prides, among others. Some of the greatest dangers facing these animals are undoubtedly humans and their actions.

Practices such as poaching, deforestation, agriculture, expansion of human infrastructure and depletion of water sources have brought some animal species to the brink of extinction or to the status of critically endangered according to the World Wildlife Fund.



Prince William with the 2021 Tusk Conservation Awards Winners (source: Tusk Trust)

One of the voices amplifying animal conservation is the Duke of Cambridge, Prince William. He has been an active spokesperson on issues affecting wildlife in Africa for many years. He was made the Royal Patron of Tusk, a wildlife conservation trust that focuses on African wildlife conservation in 2005. And though it is indeed important to have influential figures like British royalty spearheading and promoting such causes, his comments last November have brought unwanted and harmful controversy to the cause of wildlife preservation.

He said that “the increasing pressure on Africa's wildlife and wild spaces as a result of human population presents a huge challenge for conservationists, as it does the world over.” Whilst on the surface this statement simply implies that with the growing human population on the continent it is going to pose a challenge for the animal population to have sufficient space and resources, some criticisms came from groups such as Survival International, a human rights organisation that campaigns for the rights of indigenous and/or tribal peoples did not agree with the sentiment. Many people, like Journalist Nadine Batchelor-Hunt, criticised the simplified and narrow-minded view that the growing human population, particularly in Africa, is one of the main issues that are going to affect the African wildlife as compared to other issues.

Online criticism on social media platforms like Twitter, opinion pieces and articles from news outlets such as Aljazeera pointed out that such a statement does not take into account the myriad of reasons why people on the continent may resort to poaching for example as a result of poverty and unemployment. Such talking points have historically been used to support eugenicist ideas in the 18th century, which laid the foundations for promoting population control regarding climate change.

Insinuating that overpopulation is one of the reasons why there are climate issues and shortage of resources can be debated. Such justifications usually have their basis on poor and mainly black and brown populations in the Global South, attributing the problem to a lack of resources, and not on the massive waste and unequal distribution of resources caused by mainly western and rich countries during and after colonising and exploiting those regions.

Rumbi is a second year student in the International and European Law program at THUAS. She loves reading and is a bit of a movie buff. She loves to cook and finding new food spots around The Hague.



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Once you feel ready to share it with the world, reach out to us and send us what you wrote (anonymous or not).

Impressum

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